**Multimodal Study Strategies**

If you have multiple preferences you are in the majority, as approximately 60% of any population fits that category.

Multiple preferences are interesting and varied. For example you may have two strong preferences Visual and Aural (VA) or Read/write and Kinesthetic (RK), or you may have three strong preferences such as VAR or ARK. Some people have no standout scores. Their scores are almost even for all four modes. For example one person had scores of V=6, A=6, R=6, and K=6. She said that she adapted to the mode being used or requested. If the teacher or supervisor preferred a written mode she switched into Read/write for her responses and for her learning.

So multiple preferences give you choices of two or three or four modes to use for your learning and for your interaction with others. Positive reactions mean that those with multimodal preferences choose to match or align their mode to the significant others around them. But, some people have admitted that if they want to be annoying they may stay in a mode different from the person with whom they are working. For example they may ask for written evidence in an argument, knowing that the other person much prefers to refer only to oral information. This can be used in argument or debate.

You will need to read two or three or four lists of strategies provided in the Helpsheets. If you have two almost equal preferences please read the study strategies that apply to both preferences. If you have three preferences read the three lists that apply and similarly for those with four. There is obviously no multimodal helpsheet. One interesting piece of information that people with multimodal preferences have told us is that it is often necessary for them to use more than one strategy for learning and communicating. They feel insecure with only one. Alternatively those with a single preference often *"get it"* by using the set of strategies that align with that single preference.

We are also noticing some differences among those who are multimodal and who have chosen fewer than 25 options and those who have chosen more than 30. Those who have chosen fewer than 25 of the options in the questionnaire prefer to see their highest score as their main preference - almost like a single preference and they use their prefrences singly to suit each situation. Those who have a total VARK score larger than 30 tend to use their preferences in combination. To read more about Multimodality you can download an article written by Neil Fleming here: [Multimodality](http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page_content/multimodality.htm)

#### VARK: A REVIEW OF THOSE WHO ARE MULTIMODAL

Recently my views about those who are multimodal have been extended. Here is my current thinking.

Multimodal preferences dominate the database for all populations and it is clearly the most used set of preferences when making decisions about learning. Usually one third of respondents are in the four-part VARK set and another large group are in the three and two-part modalities. This dominance can be disappointing as some people feel that their special characteristic have been lumped into a largely undistinguished category and inappropriately recognised. It also means that teachers, trainers and coaches may be at odds as to how they might help people with those prefiles.

#### Context Specific Approach

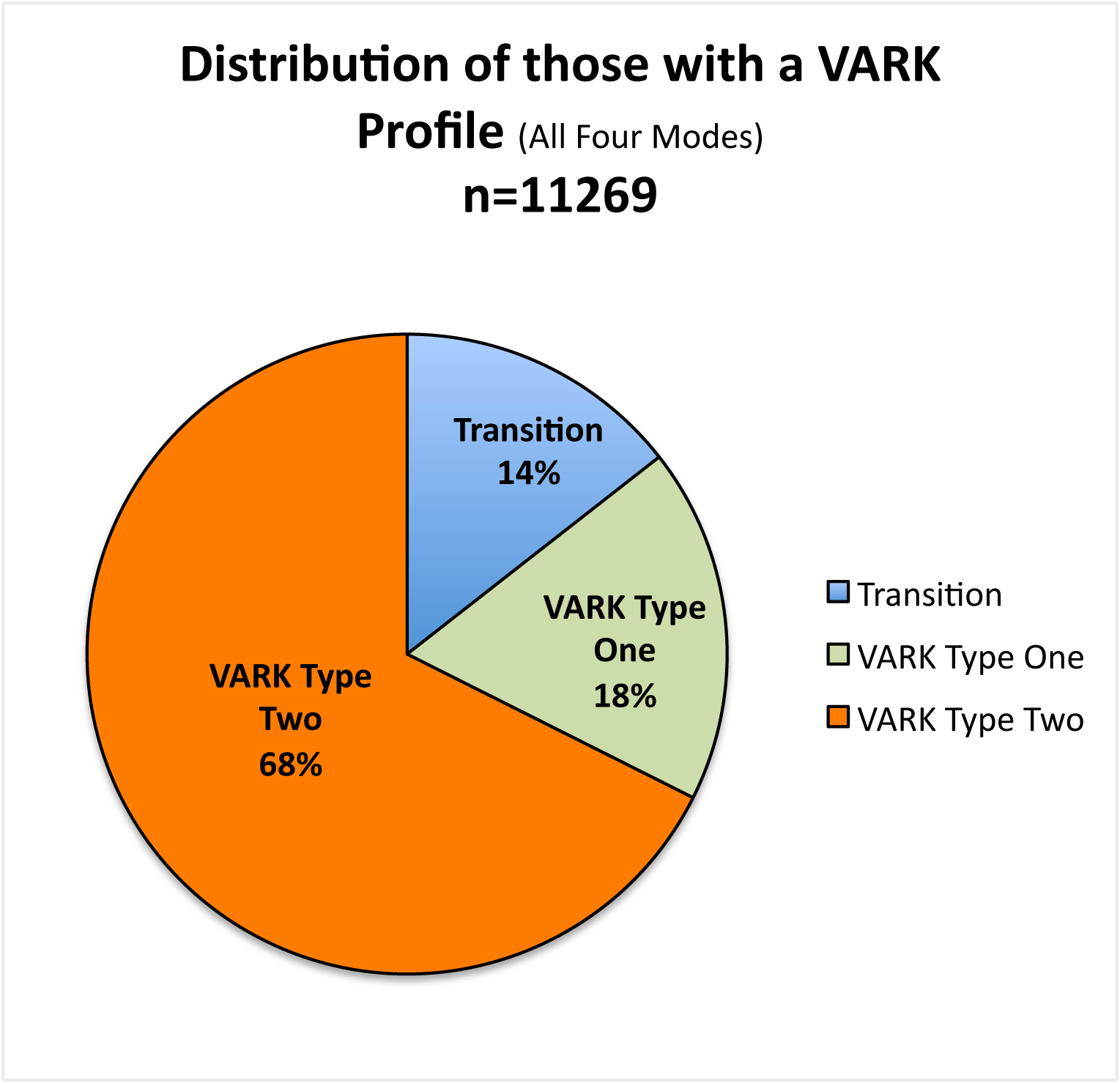
Those who have a multimodal approach to learning and decision making are now seen in two groups with an indistinct boundary or transition between them.  Some act like those people with a single preference except that they have two three or four *single* preferences. They look at the information that has to be learned or conveyed to another person and choose the mode that they believe is the best one for that situation.  In a sense they are *context specific* choosing the mode that best fits the need.  For example, if they are signing a legal document they "switch on" their Read/write preference.  If they have to learn a physical skill they will use their Kinesthetic preference to work with it, to try it and to become practical.  This group switches from mode to mode and they have the flexibility to adapt to a number of different modes both incoming and outgoing. They may sometimes choose a mode incorrectly and when working with them we need to be aware of the mode that they have chosen. We can match their mode or suggest that they switch to a more appropriate one. Blank looks and inappropriate feedback will indicate that they are out-of-sync. From the VARK Questionnaire this group tends to have a low total score –somewhere between 13 and 26.

#### Whole-Sense Approach

This second group within the multimodal VARK category uses a number of their modes (2, 3 or all four) in combination, to make decisions and to learn and to present materials to others.   They are uncertain about any learning that comes in only one way and they want to reinforce it by adding other modes of input or output.  For example in a high school, college or university they may gather some of the ideas from the teacher's oral explanations, and some from discussing and questioning their colleagues. They may add to this by using the textbook or by thinking about some practical applications of the new idea they have learned.  They may also use their Visual preference to draw some form of schematic diagram of the material to be learned.   These choices use their Visual, Aural, Read/write and Kinesthetic preferences. Only by this multiple use are they satisfied that they really understand something. In a coaching scene they may want to check out any print instructions by chatting with the coach or other athletes or they may want to map out their response in some diagrammatic way. Often they will want to step through a sequence of Visual, Aural or written instructions in some physical or quasi-physical way.

Some, may criticise them for taking a long time to make a decision. That is because they are being careful and gathering a wider view before acting. This group tends to have total VARK scores above 30.  You may recognise their need to examine things from many perspectives. They may act and decide slowly which may annoy someone who acts quickly and wants to move on.

This group takes longer to become confident about their learning because they have to gather in two, three or four modes to really understand something. They are not content with half-learning something. The payback is that, when they do so, their understanding of their new learning is more versatile and more sure than those with only a single preference.  This is an advantage if they have to express or hand on their learning to others (say, as teachers) because they will have a deeper and wider understanding of it.  They can see things from many perspectives. The disadvantage that this group has is that they may not be able to gather in the many ways that would be satisfying so they often half-learn new material and it is not fully understood.   If their teacher or coach uses only one mode to explain something – say a Read/write teacher who uses a text book most of the time or a coach who only demonstrates a technique, they may have difficulty learning that skill or information.  They are unlike those with a single preference because they are reluctant to act on a single mode. They worry about missing other perspectives on a problem or making a major decision on insufficient evidence. In one study of students who asked for help from a learning centre, a high proportion was multimodal VARK. Some complained that they did not get enough teaching. Others said there was not enough variety for effective learning.



#### Sequencing

Another clue to multimodality might be in the order in which people gather information.  Maybe they always begin with something written or maybe they start by trying it themselves before asking for help from others.  This may indicate that within their VARK multimodality there is a primary mode and that they use the others only as support.  They should redo the VARK questionnaire and select only one answer per question. It may indicate a primary preference within their multimodality but even so, they should not base their learning on that alone as they need all preferences -  2, 3 or 4.

Recently I have noted some similarities between the work done by the Swedish theorists, Marton and Saljo who pioneered the *approaches-to-learning* theories. Their idea was that learners approach a learning task in one of three modes.  Some approach their learning with the intention of fully understanding it just as one would if you had to teach it next day to somebody else.  That is similar to the second group above.  They want a ãfull understanding. The second categorisation in Marton and Saljo's work were those who approached their learning in a surface or superficial way.  They merely wanted to skim through the tasks and get a very simplistic understanding of it.  The third group were those who took a strategic approach - those who used  thestrategies that would get them a successful outcome. They would learn only enough to satisfy their need for a B-grade or whatever.  These learners are probably like the VARK multimodals Type One above who select material according to the context and their need. This research often gets wrongly stated as *deep* and *surface* and *strategic* learning.  Marton and Saljo state that it is the approach that is deep, surface or strategic not the learning.  Learners can shift from one approach to another depending on their mood, the subject being learne

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